1. Ideal and Reality of EIU

It is a reality that competitions are growing stronger and conflicts are breaking out continually between nations, regions, and ethnic groups. Though a hopeful new century has begun. Even at this moment, wars full of hatred continue between tribes and nations in Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia. Additionally, hegemony and self-interests are predominant, and even growing, in international relations and international economy.

In spite of this reality, efforts to promote mutual understanding and respect between states, nations, and regions have been made continuously all over the world for the purpose of fostering a peaceful world for all mankind. Above all, the philosophy of UNESCO is still prominent: proclaiming that it is in the minds of men that the defenses of peace must be constructed since wars begin in the minds of men. And UNESCO underlined that education for eliminating distrust and promoting mutual understanding among states is imperative. The goal of implanting peace instead of conflict in the minds of men is an ideal, which must be pursued continuously without interruption.

In this regard, no one can deny the importance of education for international understanding; especially today, when international activities and affairs become routines due to the globalization, and when mutual understanding and respect between states and nations are pressing needs. International inter-dependence grows continuously, and inter-national, inter-business, and inter-personal contacts have increased more rapidly since the end of 20th century. In this environment, the future of mankind would be dark if mutual distrust and mutual hatred instead of mutual
understanding and mutual respect were amplified. Education for mutual understanding and respect is more needed nowadays than in any other age.

However, educational policies in majority of nations tend to focus on international competitiveness rather than international understanding, because globalization intensifies economic competitions among states. The educational reforms in many countries since the 1980s show that the directions of most reforms are focused on restructuring education for improving international competitiveness. National policy makers realized that education the core of nations’ competitiveness in the knowledge-based society where knowledge and information provided the base of production, profit making, and military power. Education has become an independent variable creating economic and political power from a dependent variable of power in the past. That is why great powers such as the U.S., the U.K., Germany, and France have sought educational reforms focusing on reinforcing international competitiveness.

Policy-makers in education concentrate their efforts on education for international competitiveness rather than international understanding, even though they acknowledge the value of understanding and respecting others. It should be noted that political influences of the educators for international understanding is generally weak in the process of national policy-making.

It is a pity that the gap between the ideal and the reality of education for international understanding seems to get wider, rather than narrower. Though many states formally assert the importance of education for international understanding, it is just diplomatic propaganda in most cases. In reality, they tend to emphasize strengthening education for their own national interest. Great powers have even stronger tendencies of pursuing self-interest. Therefore, education for international understanding is given low priority in education policies. To narrow the gap between the ideal and the reality is a challenging task for those who work in education for international understanding.

2. Development of EIU

Since education for international understanding was adopted as the guideline of world education at the 1st General Conference in 1946, UNESCO has made great efforts to encourage education for mutual understanding and respect, though the terms have changed a bit. Specifically, when UNESCO resolved to implement education for international understanding at the General Conference in 1953, people had great
expectations for the bright future which it could produce. It seemed that mankind would be able to enjoy true peace, escaping from wars and destruction, if every school in the world had taught understanding, tolerance, and trust through education for international understanding. In other words, education for international understanding was a great hope for the future of mankind.

The UNESCO headquarters encouraged member countries to implement education for international understanding, and to organize a network of UNESCO Associated Schools Project (ASP). The idea of ASP was that UNESCO appointed the schools participating in education for international understanding as ‘UNESCO Associated Schools,’ and strengthened the relationship among the schools. In the beginning, the ASP schools focused on understanding other cultures, activities of international organizations, and universal human values including human rights, democracy, peace, tolerance, and understanding. The scope of the educational contents has been gradually widened to meet the contemporary problems like environmental problems, poverty, food, women, etc.

Schools in many countries took part in UNESCO Associated Schools Project. Korea also participated in the ASP with four schools in 1961 upon the decision of the Korean National Commission for UNESCO.

However, this Project was not successful to attract as many schools as had expected. The number of schools participated in ASP was not growing significantly and the enthusiasm of member countries was not enough. Education for international understanding was very low in the priority of education policy in most countries. In order to recover from this setback, UNESCO adopted a recommendation on November 19, 1974 to urge member countries to facilitate education for international understanding. Nonetheless, it continued to be disappointed.

The total number of elementary and middle schools taking part in the UNESCO ASP is now around 4,000. That is, the average number of schools implementing education for international understanding in each country is only a few dozens. In case of Korea, there are 68 schools at the present. Though it is over the world average, it does not reach even 1% of the more than 10,000 elementary and middle schools in Korea. This statistics clearly shows the reality that UNESCO’s project of education for international understanding has not been popular among member countries and schools. What is the reason?

One of the major reasons that education for international understanding has not been widely accepted can be found in UNESCO’s somewhat romantic approach to education for international understanding. It is quite idealistic to envision education
as being capable of constructing peace in the minds of men in order to prevent wars and to build a peaceful world. Education for international understanding contains the lofty ambition of teaching students of all over the world: understanding and respect of other cultures, tolerance of peoples from other countries like family; and have to seek the well-being of all mankind first, rather than national interests. This vision was so idealistic that political leaders of many countries welcomed the UNESCO Project in lip service but neglected it in real policy-making.

Since reality of international relations has not been changed much, many states competitively seek national interests first. As the result, strong states win and weak states lose in international arena. If a state is not strong enough, it has difficulty in gaining economic and political interests and even in protecting its own people. Some people say that national identity and national interests are no longer meaningful in this globalized world, but, in fact, states are more concentrating on national interests and are more emphasizing national identity than ever before. Great powers have stronger tendencies than weaker states in seeking national interests. Therefore, governments generally hesitated to participate in UNESCO’s idealistic goal of education for international understanding. Many governments are concerned about the contradiction between the ideal of education for international understanding and the competitive reality of the needs for strong national identities and interests. It would be noted that UNESCO has not been able to manage effectively the reluctance of member countries for actively participating in educational campaign for international understanding.

In contrast with UNESCO’s romantic approach, there is a national interest approach to international education that emphasize the basic goal for national interest by fostering people to adjust more successfully to internationalization and globalization. In case of using terms of ‘international education’ or ‘global education’ instead of ‘education for international understanding,’ this tendency is obvious. Usually, they pursue their own goals and directions rather than the goals of the UNESCO Associated Schools Project.

For instance, the Federal Government of the U.S. began promoting international education emphasizing foreign languages and knowledge about foreign countries after World War II. The U.S. Department of State, the Department of Defense, the Agency for International Development (USAID) and etc. took the initiative in promoting international education and, in 1966, the U.S. government institutionalized the support for international education and international studies by the legislation of International Education Act. This policy implies the intention to nourish the people
as “world’s leaders” in accordance with its growing international hegemony after the World War II. This is inferred from the facts that the Department of State, the Department of Defense, and the USAID rather than other agencies initiated international education and that the purpose of the legislation was to reinforce the studies and education about foreign countries. The phrase of ‘global education’ became more popular than ‘international education’ since 1970s.

Criticisms appeared as many schools involving global education started to teach the understanding and respect of other cultures, international justice, peace, etc. The main argument was that such peace-directed education would not be helpful for the U.S. national interests because it was merely a “naïve utopian thought.” Of course, it would not be the case that every U.S. educator did think like this. Nevertheless, national policy took its course to the education for the people of the world’s leader.

Japan appears to have taken its own way, instead of following the educational purpose and contents of the UNESCO Associated Schools Project. The ultimate goal seems to be similar to that of the U.S., emphasizing international knowledge and national identity as a world leader. It would be noticeable that not a few nations have taken a national interest approach to international education.

2. A Critical Approach to EIU

Previous paragraphs imply that a new approach is required to realize UNESCO’s goal of international understanding for peaceful world. A new approach to education for international understanding should one that is able to overcome selfishness of the national interest approach a swell as helpless ness of the romantic approach. There is a need of proper and powerful measures to lead national governments to accept and implement the ideal of education for international understanding.

I would suggest a critical approach that directs attention to critical accounts of national educational policies and practices in terms of UNESCO’s education for international understanding. A means to the end might be an international indicator of EIU, to be developed to expose correctly the level of education for international understanding in a country. The EIU indicator would consist of items including numbers of students and schools participating in UNESCO ASP, curriculum, teaching materials, and teacher training by country. Using the EIU indicator, a group of experts may review periodically, every five years for instance, national policies and educational practices on international education of member nations, and publish the
reports. What I suggest here is that UNESCO needs to develop powerful measures to exert pressure on those nations hesitating to practice education for international understanding properly.

In a sense, the modern history is the continuation of conquer, slaughter, and hatred. Even at the present moment, local conflicts continue in many places. The aftermath of the 20th century's outrageous imperialism still remains as a form of disputes and conflicts. There are many countries with potential to escalate conflicts between the ex-rulers and the ex-colonies, while another countries still suffer from political, economic and cultural dependency on the ex-colonizer. These phenomena still continue in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America.

In order to break the fetters of this contemporary history and to live peacefully, the spirit of tolerance and symbiosis should be settled. That is why UNESCO has persistently proclaimed tolerance and peace. In order to achieve tolerance and symbiosis, the assailant countries should beseech sufferers for tolerance first. It is a big misunderstanding if the assailant assumes that economic aids to the sufferer can be substituted for tolerance. It is difficult for the assailant to receive tolerance from the sufferer by glossing over or rationalizing the past plunder and ruling. Beseeching tolerance takes first priority, and then the assailant's request for reconciliation and symbiosis to the sufferer should follow next. Nevertheless, some of the past assailant countries have repeatedly attempted to rationalize the ruling/ruled relationship, rather than admitting fault wholeheartedly and asking for tolerance.

Educators have to recognize the reality of history precisely, and have to face facts as they are. Otherwise, they likely make fault unconsciously by justifying the biased power structure of the world and by compelling past victims to accept inappropriate tolerance and symbiosis. Education for international understanding should contribute to the historic mission to correct the distorted international relations through the critical perception on the history and the contemporary power structure.

What is required for leading the critical approach to success is the cooperation and the support from international non-governmental organizations as well as from national NGOs. The critical approach is difficult to succeed if international education depends on only governments. Expecting a government to keep away from the national interest might be the same as "seeking fish on a tree." In this regard, it is significant for education for international understanding to be settled as the core task of world civil movements to accomplish true sublime goal of world peace.
<Reference>


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